Title: Chronicles of infinite injustice: Arundhati Roy's radical critique of contemporary India

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Synopsis

My research proposes an analysis of the fiction and non-fictional works of Arundhati Roy written during 1997 to 2011. This includes, *The God of Small Things*(1997), *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* (2002), which is the first collection of her nonfictional writing,*An Ordinary Person's Guide to Empire* (2005),*Listening to Grass Hoppers: Field Notes on Democracy*(2009), *The Shape of The Beast* (2009*)* and her recent publication *Broken Republic* (2011). *The God of Small Things* and the non fictions should be studied together to get a fuller understanding of Arundhati Roy's ideological position. As Roy says, her fiction can be regarded as political in the most inclusive sense, as it brought to the fore how the politics of class-caste and gender are deeply rooted in the largely feudal Indian society, and her political essays narrate in deeply moving ways the story of powerlessness of the ordinary people. In the non-fictions Roy's gods of small things are the dalits, the adivasis, the people who live in forests, on hills, beside rivers, amidst nature and who have faced the brunt of corporate greed and the nation-state's callousness to the extreme.

Between 2002 and 2005 Roy received twoprestigious international awards: the 2002 Lannan Prize for Cultural Freedom which she received on13 May, 2003 in Harlem and the 2004 Sidney Peace Prize. On the former occasion she delivered the speech 'Instant Mix Imperial Democracy(Buy One Get One Free)', while on the latter she talked about 'Peace and the New Corporate Liberation Theology' Both the speeches are expressions of her 'uncomfortable' thoughts about money, war, empire, racism, and democracy. 'Come September' was presented as a lecture in New Mexico in September 2002, one year after the terrorist attack in America. Introducing Chomsky's *For Reasons of State*(2003), Roy engages the reader with the US aggression in North and South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. She raises her voice against the institutions like the World Bank, the IMF, Satellite T.V., multinationals like Enron, Ogden etc. Though, a significant number of Arundhati Roy's essays are critiques of the United States of America, its military expeditions and coups, genocide,and destabilisation of foreign government, particularly in the 'Middle-East', I have decided to leave these out (except as they impinge on the larger issues of corporate globalisation) and focus solely on the Indian context.

Though it is difficult to categorise Roy, she could perhaps be described as anactivist-writer, whose vigilant gaze minutely scrutinises the injustices perpetrated by the powerful Indian state-corporate nexus, on ordinary people. It is worth noting that it is this multitude,which ironically enough has been instrumental in bringing the government to existence through a process of electoral democracy.Roy deploys her razor-sharp intelligence expressed through a passionate yet reasoned rhetoric to scathingly criticise systems which are anti-ordinary people whether it be the deep-rooted caste/class and gender-prejudices of the Left as in *The God of Small Things*; the multiple malaise of Liberalisation manifested through the state's abdication of responsibility in the public sectors of health and education; displacement of multitudes in the course of multinational projects; aggressive 'civil war' against its own people in conducting a 'war on terrorism.' I shall argue that the central issue in her works is that Roy is engaged in a radical critique of Indian nation-state's nexus with powerful corporations in framing its anti-people policies of globalisation and 'development.'

Indeed there is very little which escapes her pen: displacement of millions connected with the construction of Big Dams, privatisation of infrastructure, Maoist movement and the state's war on its own people in the name of controllingterrorism, corporatisation, neo-imperialism, role of media, destruction of agricultural set up.If we study Roy's work carefully we shall find that these apparently separate issues are interlinked.The central issue which links many of these is development or more pertinently the politics of development as it obtains state-corporate policy. As Roy sees it, industrialisation, urbanisation and export of resources is totally undemocratic as the contracts do not involve the choice of those who suffer the effects of development programme. Since independence, developmental projects in India have not been for the betterment of the condition of the poor but for the benefit of a handful of rich and powerful.

The reason why Roy is against the politics of development is that there is a vast gap between policy making and the real implementation of the policies. Development is promoted for the interest of neoliberal globalisation and produced from the same desire to expand and speed up capitalism to establish power. Development in post independence India has resulted in plundering of resources, displacement, starvation and often the complete annihilation of the marginalised. From another perspective we can say that the same age old desire to establish economic supremacy has created corporate globalisation.

A tentative chapter division of my thesis is as follows: The Introduction will try to historicise the main issues of global corporate and development which mark Arundhati Roy's work. In this context I shall discuss two books:Warwick E. Murray's *Geographies of Globalization,* an excellent book on the rise and spread of globalisation, and Ranjan Ghosh and Antonia Navarro Tejero's(ed) *Globalizing Dissent: Essays on Arundhati Roy.*Murray argues that capitalism has given birth to uneven and fragmented society; he connects post- cold war scenario to the rise of neo liberalism; the oil geopolitics to the rise of Taliban; the war on terrorism and false propaganda created by USA. The edited volume of essaysfocuses on some significant aspects of Roy's fiction and non-fictional writing and helps place her work in the contemporary critical history of ideas.

The first chapter will focus on her novel,*The God of Small Things.* From its selection for Booker to the use of unrestrained language to describe sexuality, the book has never been without criticism. A nuanced and sophisticated intertextual work, Roy's novel is a deeply

moving account of the lives of the dizygotic twins, Rahel and Estha, their beautiful mother 'ammu' and her lover. The history of humanity is associated with big things. The smallness which Roy adores may be understood as specificity of objects, the peripheral issues as against the 'core'.

The second chapter will focus on three issues-corporate globalization, development and displacement. I shall focus primarily on the collection of essays, *The Algebra of Infinite Justice*. Roy has donated her Booker prize money as well as the royalties for the cause of Narmada BachaoAndolan. She appeared in Franny Armstrong's *Drowned Out* (2002),a documentary about the project. Roy has also written the screen play of the documentary *DAM/AGE: A Film With Arundhati Roy* (2002) about the same project. Roy's ideas about the Narmada Valley Project have been expressed in a more organised form in the essay, 'The Cost of Living' which was published in The Hindu from February 5 – 8 in 2000. 'Power Politics' in the same collection is about privatisation and corporatisation of basic infrastructure.

The theme of the third chapter will be the twin monsters of secularism and terrorism. In this chapter I shall focus on Roy's views on the internal conflicts in India, Islamist terrorism and Kashmir issue, religious fascism and Maoism. These issues again must be associated with corporatisation, nation building projects and the process of annihilating the minority sector. Most of the essays in the collection *An Ordinary Person's Guide to Empire* have been speeches or lectures delivered on different occasions. *Listening to Grass Hoppers: Field Notes on Democracy(2009)* deals with the nature of Islamist terrorism in India. Most of the essays in this collection are about terrorist activity in India, and the state sponsored terror to control them. In this chapter I shall also focus on *Broken Republic,* whichis about the recent threat to the Indian nation by Maoist activities in the forests of central India. Here again Roy depicts how the indigenous communities which have been denied the opportunityto lead a dignified life for a long time, are being destroyed in the name of development.

The conclusion will attempt to show how Roy does manage to draw attention and will continue to do so for her eagerness to attach herself to the incidents around her, and to 'never look away.' Roy is not against development and modernisation. She is against politics of development which involves undemocratic decision making. The pivot around which Roy makes her arguments rotate is that the policies of development taken by government as well as private agencies are destructive.I will try also to explore Roy's own comments on the said issues as expressed in her interviews with renowned journalists like N. Ram, David Barsamian, Anthony Arnove, P.G. Rasool, and Shoma Chaudhury in the volume *The Shape of the Beast*. Roy has reversed some common definitions. The image of India which is projected before the world is that of a shining emerging nation but the image Arundhati Roy depicts is that of a place where two convoys are going in opposite direction with an increasing gap between them ('the ladies have feelings'186). Arundhati Roy's novel and her non-fictional writing are both, in a sense, a version of 'history from below' through which she produces chronicles of infinite injustice of contemporary India.

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